

# OPINION

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR: CITY DESK@DAILYCHRONICLE.COM

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## OUR OPINION

### Big Sky Youth Empowerment Project helping kids transform their futures

**W**e forget: Adolescence is the most difficult time in our lives. Teens and pre-teens face a world of uncertainty and anxiety. Thankfully, most teens successfully navigate these troubled waters with the help of family, peers and their schools. But for some, those resources aren't there or they aren't enough.

Big Sky Youth Empowerment has been trying to fill in these gaps for more than 10 years — with evident success. The program combines mentoring, outdoor recreation and life-skills training to help troubled youth cope with alcohol and drug abuse, broken homes and the aimlessness that places young people at risk for failure.

BYEP initially accepted only teens and pre-teens facing life challenges in grades seven through 10. More recently, the program has begun accepting 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> graders dealing with similar issues.

Finite resources limit BYEP to accepting only 25 participants each year — just a third of the total who apply. Successful applicants are chosen on the basis of challenges they face, including financial difficulties, physical challenges, substance abuse and legal, school and family problems.

BYEP survives on donations and the help of volunteers. This generosity allows those accepted into the program to gain its benefits free of charge. And in an era of growing numbers of single-parent families, this type of a program has become increasingly important.

No one can say for sure how many of the kids helped by BYEP are saved from becoming a burden of the legal system or taxpayer-funded social programs. But program participants report that it has made it possible for them to turn lives around that were headed for trouble with the law or worse.

Among the pantheon of nonprofits that compete for our generosity, it's easy for programs like BYEP to blend in with the crowd. But this has proven to be one of those causes that is worthy of special consideration.